

End of Rotterdam International Architecture Biennale

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The fourth year of International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam exhibition, titled “Open City: Designing Coexistence” finished last Sunday. The so called big architecture - as we understand and perceive it in the Czech Republic - would be searched in vain in the Nederlands Architectuur Instituut building. Even practical examples of “everyday architecture”, so awarded and respected in the Netherlands, were on display marginally.

Rotterdam Biennale is traditionally focused on social, social-economic and cultural starting-points of architectural creations and especially urbanism in practical and theoretical positions. These are on display at the Biennale rather than artistic speculations or technical and technological news in the hands of architecture show-business representatives.

The central theme of the Biennale this year was presented firstly in the context of the host city, secondly on a number of cases from the entire world - these were all linked by the motif of social urgency. (A little “on the side” was in many regards the Russian exposition. It was not uninteresting or without contribution, however, this effect was unplanned. It introduced formally developed designs of functionalist Soviet architecture in the form of town swimming pools or cafeterias for thousands of “new” people; these designs have caught on only minimally in practical life).

Rotterdam itself, or its presentation of urban development on the Biennale were more than interesting for a Czech architect or city planner. The city put its postwar restoration and development in the hands of central planners. “That is not it!”, said city’s inhabitants after some time and new low “neighbour” communities started to emerge. Living in them was good, though they did not contribute neither to the city’s economy nor to its prestige. An era of deregulation, privatizations and developers came. Where will the city development turn now and who will be its new “saviour”? The exhibition does not offer an answer to this question. Only principles and fragments of (possibly) new concepts are postulated - these should lead to finding (even) better solutions than in the past. The past concepts are indelibly written in the city’s structure and culture and it is not possible to delete them - and it would not be wise either.

The Biennale brought a number of other architectural and urbanistic (as well as sociological, social-field, political ...) challenges and enterprises. Istanbul, or its illegally built and socially excluded locations; similarly Rome, the island of Lampedusa (where the illegal constructor is the Italian government); slums of Latin America and the Far East cities and refugee camps and devastated towns of Palestine. Designs of Alejandro Aravena from Chilean studio Elemental were on display among others. These could be an inspiration for the current attempts to eliminate deprived areas in the Czech Republic. They could be if two principal differences were overcome. Firstly, people in the world who live or should live in such locations generally try to improve their living conditions. This factor is missing in the Czech conditions. The basic obstacle of such enterprises in the Czech “ghettos” is the absence of any motivation and any enduring initiative of their inhabitants to do anything “to have a better life”. Inhabitants of a slum Jakarta as well as in Buenos Aires will get nothing for free. Any help, any contribution (if the public sector is willing to some) are conditioned by corresponding, reciprocal contribution from the side of the recipient of the help. Secondly, objective living conditions in most deprived areas in the Czech Republic are today

better than those which can be (hopefully) expected in future by inhabitants of similar locations anywhere in the world - in case some of the intentions, introduced to public on the 4th Rotterdam Biennale, are successful.

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